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A Track Record of Prioritizing Bioterrorism Defenses

Forging ahead in the ongoing war against terror, the National Institutes of Health is developing a \$50 million program to bolster medical countermeasures for use against a radiological attack. This comes just one week after President Bush announced his “Biodefense for the 21st Century” plan – a Presidential Directive to combat chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological weapons.

These two measures build on the major progress that has been made in strengthening our bioterror defenses since 2001. Under the leadership of the Department of Homeland Security, we have established a strong national public health and emergency response capability.

Among the many initiatives already launched to counter the bioterror threat:

- ✓ *BioWatch* – a program that monitors the air over major cities for biological releases. In the FY2005 budget request, the Administration requested an additional \$118 million to expand the program.
- ✓ *Improved vaccine and countermeasure research by NIAID* – The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health, conducts and supports much of the research aimed at developing new and improved medical tools against potential bioterrorism agents. Since 2001, NIAID has greatly accelerated its biodefense research program, launching several new initiatives to catalyze development of vaccines, therapies, and diagnostic tests.
 - In March 2004, NIAID demonstrated the effectiveness of a safer smallpox vaccine against monkeypox. In November 2003, NIAID began the first human trial of a vaccine against the Ebola virus. In September 2003, an Institute study yielded new insights into how the body responds to anthrax bacteria.
- ✓ *Biosurveillance Initiative* – a new \$274 million cross-cutting interagency effort to build a comprehensive detection system for bioterrorist attacks, coordinating previously disjointed efforts at biosurveillance of environment, food supply, and human populations.

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Strengthening biodefense capabilities are a top homeland security priority for our nation. As these initiatives demonstrate, the Department of Homeland Security, in conjunction with Congress and other Cabinet agencies, has shown leadership in creating a blueprint for action. In the coming months, we must remain vigilant, as we continue to build our defenses as necessary. While much has been accomplished so far in the long-term war against terror, we cannot afford to become complacent about the bioterrorism threat.

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